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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [JO](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: GOJ ELABORATES ON ITS WITHDRAWAL OF RECOGNITION OF
GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCH IN JERUSALEM

REF: A. AMMAN 2241
[1](#)B. ATHENS 1021
[1](#)C. JERUSALEM 225

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: JORDAN'S RATIONALE FOR WITHDRAWING RECOGNITION OF GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III IS BASED ON UNFULFILLED PROMISES REGARDING THE RECLAMATION OF CHURCH LANDS AND INCREASING THE ROLE OF ARAB MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH MADE TO THE GOJ WHEN THEOPHILOS ASCENDED TO THE PATRIARCHY IN 2005. THE GOJ RETAINS COPIES OF LETTERS ALLEGEDLY FROM SENIOR ISRAELI OFFICIALS TO THEOPHILOS OFFERING AN EXCHANGE OF RECOGNITION FOR THE SALE OF SPECIFIC PROPERTIES IN JERUSALEM. THE GOJ'S DECISION TO WITHDRAW RECOGNITION DOES NOT BECOME FINAL UNTIL KING ABDULLAH RATIFIES IT. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (SBU) POLCOUNS MET WITH MFA DIRECTOR OF NORTH AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS NABIH SHUKOM ON MAY 29 TO SEEK GOJ EXPLANATION FOR ITS WITHDRAWAL OF RECOGNITION OF THE GREEK PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED (REFTELS). SHUKOM HIGHLIGHTED THE HISTORICAL ANOMALY OF MAINTAINING A GREEK-RUN CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AS A VESTIGE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE. NEVERTHELESS, THE GOJ'S SPECIAL ROLE IN RATIFYING THE PATRIARCH DERIVES FROM TRADITION AND A 1958 JORDANIAN LAW ON THE GREEK CHURCH, WHICH THE GOJ MAINTAINS IS STILL IN FORCE UNDER GENEVA CONVENTION PROVISIONS ON OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, AND UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW ON STATE SUCCESSION.

[1](#)3. (C) SHUKOM REPORTED THAT THE ISSUE CAME TO A HEAD THIS MONTH WHEN AN ARAB GREEK ORTHODOX DELEGATION, INCLUDING AN ARCHBISHOP AND TWO PRIESTS, VISITED THE GOJ TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THEOPHILOS FAILURE TO ENHANCE THE ROLE OF ARABS IN THE CHURCH. SHUKOM CITED ONLY ONE ARAB AMONGST THE SIXTEEN MEMBERS OF THE HOLY SYNOD, AND ONLY THREE ARABS WITHIN THE 110-MEMBER BROTHERHOOD OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER, AS EVIDENCE OF THIS FAILURE.

[1](#)4. (C) SHUKOM SAID THAT THE GOJ HELD FREQUENT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GOI AND THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY (PA) BEFORE ACTING. HE BELIEVES THE PA, CURRENTLY PREOCCUPIED WITH THE CURRENT INSTABILITY IN GAZA, WILL STAY OUT OF THE DISPUTE UNTIL IT BECOMES CLEAR WHICH WAY THE ISSUE WILL BE RESOLVED.

[1](#)5. (SBU) FOLLOWING THE JORDANIAN COUNCIL OF MINISTER'S DECISION TO WITHDRAW RECOGNITION, SHUKOM REPORTED THAT THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH RETALIATED BY DEMOTING THREE JORDANIAN GREEK ORTHODOX PRIESTS. JORDANIAN DAILY AL-RAI REPORTED ON MAY 26 THAT THE HOLY SYNOD BANNED BISHOP ATALLAH FROM LEADING MASS FOR TWO MONTHS AND ISSUED A "HARSH WARNING" AGAINST TWO OTHER PRIESTS.

IT'S ABOUT LAND

¶6. (SBU) IN HIGHLIGHTING THE PREEMINENCE OF THE LAND ISSUE, SHUKOM CLAIMED THAT THE GREEK PATRIARCH CHURCH OWNS APPROXIMATELY 18 PER CENT OF THE LAND WITHIN JERUSALEM'S OLD CITY WALLS.

¶7. (C/NF) SHUKOM CLAIMED "OFF THE RECORD" THAT THE GOJ HAS OBTAINED COPIES OF LETTERS FROM THE ISRAELI MOI AND SENIOR ISRAELI OFFICIALS EACH OFFERING THEOPHILOS GOI RECOGNITION AND ACCESS TO CHURCH BANK ACCOUNTS IN EXCHANGE FOR BACKING THE SALE OF SPECIFIC PROPERTIES.

UNFULFILLED PROMISES

¶8. (SBU) SHUKOM SHOWED POLCOUNS A COPY OF A DOCUMENT SIGNED BY THEOPHILOS PRIOR TO GOJ RECOGNITION IN 2005. ACCORDING TO THE MFA, THEOPHILOS PROMISED TO ADDRESS EIGHT SPECIFIC GOJ DEMANDS AND HAS YET TO FULFILL A SINGLE ONE. THEY ARE:

- DECLARE A LIST OF ALL PROPERTIES OWNED BY THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH (GOJ FEARS THAT THERE MAY BE FURTHER, UNPUBLICIZED LAND SALES);
- RECONSIDER HIS PREDECESSOR IRINEOS I'S DECISION TO SELL PROPERTY IN JERUSALEM AND GO TO THE ISRAELI COURTS TO RECLAIM THIS LAND;
- CEASE THE PRACTICE OF SELLING OR LEASING CHURCH LANDS TO OTHERS;
- INCREASE THE NUMBER OF ARAB MEMBERS OF THE HOLY SYNOD;
- REVIVE THE MIXED CLERGY-LAITY COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES WITH SUFFICIENT JORDANIAN AND PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION;
- OBTAIN APPROVAL OF THE HOLY SYNOD FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF THIS MIXED COUNCIL AND BEGIN SHARING POWER WITH IT;
- NOT EXPEL CLERGY WHO ARE AFFILIATED WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS; AND
- IMPLEMENT THE JORDANIAN LAW OF 1958 AS IT PERTAINS TO

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS.

OPENING A WINDOW

¶9. (C) SHUKOM NOTED THAT A DECISION OF JORDAN'S COUNCIL OF MINISTERS DOES NOT BECOME FINAL UNTIL RATIFIED BY THE KING, AND EXPRESSED HIS PERSONAL DOUBT THAT THIS WOULD OCCUR. SHUKOM REITERATED THAT THEOPHILOS' ACTION ON GOJ DEMANDS COULD HELP HIS CASE.

¶10. (SBU) ACCORDING TO SHUKOM, GREEK FM DORA BAKOYANNIS WILL VISIT JORDAN IN EARLY JUNE. ALTHOUGH THE GOJ DOES NOT CONSIDER THIS ISSUE POLITICAL, SHUKOM NOTED THAT THEIR RESPECTIVE MINISTERS COULD DISCUSS THE MATTER SHOULD IT REMAIN UNRESOLVED BY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH ACTION.

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HALE